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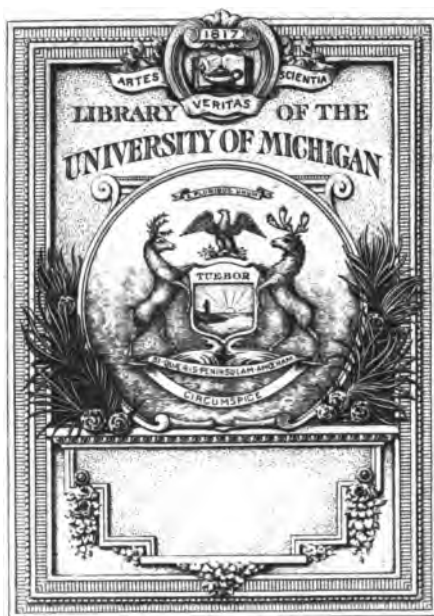
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A

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CHRISTMAS CAROL.

BEING A GHOST STORY OF CHRISTMAS.

[ABRIDGED.]



BY CHARLES DICKENS, 1843-70

EDITED FOR SCHOOL AND HOME USE BY

ALBERT F. BLAISDELL, A.M., M.D.,

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LIFE OF DICKENS.

4. Dec. 19 11.11.11

CHARLES DICKENS was born at Portsmouth, England, in 1812. His father, at the time, held a situation in the Navy Pay Department, but afterward became a Parliamentary reporter. Dickens's early life was a very hard one. At one time he was employed in pasting labels on blacking bottles; and had often to attend upon his father, who was in prison for debt. In this way he met with the lowest classes of society, even in his very childhood, and gained experiences which he afterward turned to good account in his novels. He never had much schooling; and, for what education he got, he was mostly indebted to his own industry. At length he was placed by his father in a London attorney's office, but he disliked the work, and took to reporting instead. In this occupation he proved himself to be shrewd and skillful. During his leisure hours he was accustomed to ramble about the streets of the great city, remarking whatever was odd or humorous about the people, or peculiar about the places he saw. Under the name of "Boz," first used by his little sister in attempting to say Moses, by which name Dickens called his younger brother, he wrote several *Sketches*, which were published in the *Monthly Magazine*. Shortly afterward he was engaged to write *The Pickwick Papers*—a work intended to illustrate the adventures of a Cockney sportsman. The engravings were to be the principal attraction, and Dickens was to write the explanatory chapters. Scarcely, however, had the first parts made their appearance, when it was discovered that the text was far more attractive than the illustrations. People were convulsed with laughter at the droll characters, the comical dialogues, and the ludicrous incidents introduced into the narrative. The soft-hearted Mr. Pickwick, old Mr. Weller, the sapient coachman, and Sam, his son, the wittiest of wags, became the intimate friends and acquaintances of every household. This first great work of Dickens, then, was "a hit," and the author's fame was established. Novel after novel now proceeded from his ready pen, every thing he wrote being eagerly welcomed by an enthusiastic and admiring public. In 1842, Dickens paid a visit to this country, where he received a hearty welcome. He next established a morning paper called the *Daily News*, and attempted to conduct it himself; but, after contributing a series of

Pictures from Italy, where he had for some time resided, he gave up the task as uncongenial, and continued his novel-writing. His novels were usually published in monthly parts, and, after 1843, he produced periodically, those Christmas books which are still so much admired. For many years he conducted a weekly periodical, called at first *Household Words*, and afterward *All the Year Round*, contributing novels and occasional papers to its pages. In his later years, Dickens gave public readings from his own work. Splendid readings they were, and people flocked in thousands to see and hear the generous and warm-hearted author who had so long and so cleverly entertained them through his books. Suddenly, in the summer of 1870, he died. He was busily engaged at the time on his last novel, *Edwin Drood*, which was left uncompleted. His loss was lamented over the whole civilized world.

His novels deal with life as exhibited among the middle and lower classes of society. They are characterized by a constant flow of spirits and drollery, grotesqueness and pathos. His characters are so exquisitely described that their names and pet phrases have become "common as household words." Dickens is frequently satirical, but his satire seeks to gain its end more by caricature—by making fun of its object, by holding it up to ridicule, than by such sarcasm and irony as Thackeray's; moreover, it is more frequently directed against institutions than individuals. One other peculiarity must yet be noticed. Trifles which are usually unheeded by ordinary observers are carefully noted and delightfully described by the great novelist.

Dickens was a short, thick-set man of sturdy growth. He delighted in out-door sports, and for years was given to taking long walks daily in all kinds of weather. He was passionately fond of children, quaint odd characters, and took unceasing delight in all kinds of pets, especially birds and dogs. Of a nature kind, unselfish, sympathetic, and generous, he was universally beloved by people of every station of life.

CHARLES DICKENS. 1812—1870.

"The good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever-friendly, noble Dickens, —every inch of him an Honest Man."—*Carlyle*.

"The same master-hand which drew the sorrows of the English poor drew also the picture of the unselfish kindness, the courageous patience, the tender thoughtfulness, that lie concealed behind many a coarse exterior, in many a rough heart, in many a degraded home."—*Dean Stanley*.

"The objects and purposes I have had in view are very plain and simple, and may be easily told. I have always had, and always shall have, an earnest and true desire to contribute, as far as in me lies, to the common stock of cheerful healthfulness and enjoyment."—*Dickens, on his own works*.

"He has been called an apostle of the people. I suppose it is meant that he had a mission, but in a style and fashion of his own; a gospel, a cheery, joyous, gladsome message, which the people understood, and by which they could hardly help being bettered; it was the gospel of kindness, of brotherly love, of sympathy in the widest sense of the word."—*Eulogy in Westminster Abbey*.

"Among English novelists Dickens stands alone; he occupies a field that none other has cultivated, and may justly be esteemed the creator of a new school of fiction. He was a man of strong sympathies, quick to feel and plead for the poor and oppressed, and in his books he has done yeoman service in the work of social and legal reform. His most conspicuous characteristic is humor, natural, rich, and seemingly inexhaustible, and in this quality lies the chief charm of his writings. The secret of his success seems to have consisted in his intuitive apprehension of the popular needs and tastes; no other novelist has ever lived who was so thoroughly *en rapport* with the heart of the people; he wrote for them and to them, and they acknowledged his efforts with unbounded good-will and admiration."

PRINCIPAL WORKS.

Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, Great Expectations, Old Curiosity Shop, Christmas Stories, Martin Chuzzlewit, Barnaby Rudge, Dombey and Son, David Copperfield, Hard Times, Little Dorrit, Child's History of England, Sketches, American Notes and Pictures from Italy, Uncommercial Traveler, Tale of Two Cities, Bleak House, Our Mutual Friend, The Mystery of Edwin Drood.

REFERENCES.

Of the many books which have been written about Dickens, four perhaps will amply cover the whole ground: Forster's *Life*; Fields's *Yesterdays with Authors*; Ward's *Dickens*; and Jerrold's *Best of All Good Company*. All four of these books will afford delightful reading to the general reader. The life of Dickens has been written by Mackenzie, Hanaford, Perkins, Sala, and Hotten. Reference may be had to an essay by Peter Bayne, Whipple's *Literature and Life*, Jones's *Short Life of Charles Dickens*, Kate Field's *Pen Pictures*, a chapter on Dickens in Taine, Whipple's essays on particular novels in recent numbers of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the index to *Harper's Monthly*. For general reference, Pierce's *Dickens Dictionary* will prove a most useful work for selecting passages to commit to memory, and for handy reference to any particular character or prominent feature of Dickens's works. Shepherd's *Bibliography of Dickens* may be of considerable service.

NOTE.—The Life of Forster is the latest and most authoritative, the writer having been Mr. Dickens's life-long friend and his literary executor. Of the other lives, for the most part written to supply the popular demand created by Dickens's death, Hotten's and Mackenzie's are the fullest and most satisfactory. The work by Mr. Fields consists chiefly of personal reminiscences and letters. Three volumes of letters by Dickens have been recently published, which give the reader an insight into the personal life of the great novelist.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

"Who can listen to objections regarding such a book as this? It seems to me a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it a personal kindness."—*Thackeray*.

"In December, 1843, all England was aroused from its selfish slumbering by the sound of a carol. It was no carol sung by a bird; it was sung by a man, and that man was Charles Dickens. He called it a Christmas carol; but the Anglo-Saxon world has known it ever since as "The Christmas Carol," as if, since the birth of Him who made the 25th of December a holiday, humanity had known no song worthy of being likened unto it. Thirty-eight years this carol has been sung, and yet every twelve-month its pure melody receives as hearty a welcome as Christmas itself. Hungry ears have listened to no better hymn of praise; hungry eyes have feasted on no truer or more loving counsel."—*Kate Field*.

PREFATORY NOTE.

The *Christmas Carol*, the first of a long series of Christmas stories by Charles Dickens, published in December, 1843, was hailed on every side with enthusiastic greeting. It was the work of such odd moments of leisure as were left while writing *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Dickens has told us of what befell him in its composition, with what a strange mastery it seized him for itself, how he wept over it, and laughed, and wept again, and excited himself to an extraordinary degree, and how he walked thinking of it fifteen and twenty miles about the back streets of London, and many and many a night after all sober folks had gone to bed. And when it was done, as he told his friend, President Felton of Harvard College, he let himself loose like a madman. For these forty years the *Carol* has kept its popularity. While Dickens lived, hundreds of letters were written to him by people in humble circumstances telling him amid many confidences, about their homes, how the *Carol* was read there aloud, and was kept upon a little shelf by itself, and did them no end of good. No sweeter, healthier or more cheerful work of fiction has ever been written for young people, or old ones too for that matter. When we remember the *Carol* and other Christmas stories by Dickens have been sold by the hundreds of

thousands, how shall we estimate the effect they have had in teaching lessons of fellowship and charity, in making the happy season of Christmas time more sacred and more cherished, and in furnishing examples of courage, patience, generosity, and noble feeling?

Stave I.

MARLEY'S GHOST.

MARLEY was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change¹ for anything he chose to put his hand to.

Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge never painted out old Marley's name. There it stood years afterward, above the warehouse door—Scrooge & Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge & Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No

NOTE.—CHRISTMAS CAROL, a song in commemoration of the song of the angels to the shepherds (Luke ii. 13, 14), at the Nativity. Our English literature abounds in references to the celebration of Christmas. An old writer tells us that the bishops and the clergy used to sing carols and play games on Christmas day. An old Christmas carol is familiar which begins:—

"Rejoice, our Saviour he was born
On Christmas day in the morning."

A quaint old ditty:—

"Now Christmas is come,
Let us beat up the drum,
And call all our neighbors together;
And when they appear,
Let us make them such cheer,
As will keep out the wind and the weather," etc.

A very old rhyme begins:—

"At Christmas be merry, and thankful withal,
And feast thy poor neighbors, the great with the small."

The student is referred to the charming description of the celebration of Christmas in Irving's "Sketch-Book." Read some of Herrick's beautiful Christmas songs. For general reference, consult "December 25th," in Chambers's "Book of Days."

1. 'Change.—Exchange, a place or building used in the interests of a Board of Trade. To be "good upon 'Change" is to have good credit in business.

wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty.

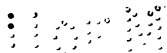
Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blind-men's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!"

But what did Scrooge care? It was the very thing he liked.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather—foggy withal—and he could hear the people in the court outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones, to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already—it had not been light all day—and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighboring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that, although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open, that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who, in a dismal little cell beyond, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be

2. Christmas, *Christ* and *mass*, Sax. *massa*, a holy day or feast.
Read the charming description of Christmas Eve and its celebration in Irving's "Sketch-Book."



necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle ; in which effort, not being a man of strong imagination, he failed.

“A merry Christmas, uncle ! God save you !” cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

“Bah !” said Scrooge. “Humbug !”

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's, that he was all in a glow ; his face was ruddy and handsome ; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

“Christmas a humbug, uncle !” said Scrooge's nephew. “You don't mean that, I am sure ?”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “Merry Christmas ! What right have you to be merry ? Out upon Merry Christmas ! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money ; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer ; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you ? If I could work my will,” said Scrooge, indignantly, “every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly run through his heart. He should !”

“Uncle !” pleaded the nephew.

“Nephew !” returned the uncle, sternly, “keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.”

“Keep it !” repeated Scrooge's nephew. “But you don't keep it.”

“Let me leave it alone, then,” said Scrooge. “Much good may it do you ! Much good it has ever done you !”

“There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say,” returned the nephew, “Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin,

if any thing belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time ; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time ; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts and to think of people below them as if they really follow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of men bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, and I think that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good ; and may it please you to bless it ! ”

Scrooge involuntarily applauded. Becoming immediately conscious of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark forever.

“I don’t hear another sound from *you*,” said Scrooge, “and I don’t see your Christmas by losing your situation ! You’re a powerful speaker, sir,” he added, turning to his nephew. “I don’t order you don’t go into Parliament.”

“I won’t be angry, uncle. Come ! Dine with us to-morrow.” Scrooge said that he would see him—yes, indeed he did. He took the whole length of the expression, and said that he would see him in that extremity first.

“But why ? ” cried Scrooge’s nephew. “Why ? ”

“Why did you get married ? ” said Scrooge.

“Because I fell in love.”

“Because you fell in love ! ” growled Scrooge, as if that were the only one thing in the world more ridiculous than a man marrying at Christmas. “Good afternoon ! ”

“I say, uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now ? ”

“Good afternoon,” said Scrooge.

“I want nothing from you ; I ask nothing of you ; why cannot we be friends ? ”

“Good afternoon,” said Scrooge.

“I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I’ll

keep my Christmas humor to the last. So, A Merry Christmas, uncle ! ”

“ Good afternoon ! ” said Scrooge.

“ And, A Happy New Year ! ”

“ Good afternoon ! ” said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding.

In letting Scrooge’s nephew out, the clerk had let two other people in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off, in Scrooge’s office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

“ Scrooge & Marley’s, I believe,” said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. “ Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley ? ”

“ Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years,” Scrooge replied. “ He died seven years ago, this very night.”

“ At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge,” said the gentleman, taking up a pen, “ it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities ; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.”

“ Are there no prisons ? ” asked Scrooge.

“ Plenty of prisons,” said the gentleman, laying down the pen again, “ but under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude, a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for ? ”

“ Nothing ! ” Scrooge replied.

“ You wish to be anonymous ? ”

“ I wish to be left alone,” said Scrooge. “ Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don’t make merry myself at Christmas, and I can’t afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have

mentioned—they cost enough ; and those who are badly off must go there."

"Many can't go there ; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population." Seeing that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew.*

At length the hour for shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

"You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose ?" said Scrooge.

"If quite convenient, sir."

"It's not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown³ for it you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound !"

The clerk smiled faintly.

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don't think *me* ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work."

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December !" said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. "But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning."

The clerk promised that he would ; and Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide on Cornhill,⁴ at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honor of its being Christmas eve, and then ran home to Camden Town⁵ as hard as he could pelt, to play at blind man's buff.⁶

* A graphic description of a London fog at Christmas time is here omitted. Cf. a similar description in the opening chapter of *Bleak House*.

3. **Half-a-Crown.**—A crown was a coin anciently stamped with a crown. The English crown is five shillings sterling.

4. **Cornhill.**—A well-known thoroughfare in London. **Camden Town,** the name of a particular section of the same city.

5. **Blind Man's Buff.**—A popular game of ancient origin, formerly called "Hoodman's blind."

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern ; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker's book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. They were a gloomy suite of rooms, in a lowering pile of buildings up a yard, where it had so little business to be, that one could scarcely help fancying it must have run there when it was a young house, playing at hide-and-seek with other houses, and have forgotten the way out again. It was old enough now, and dreary enough ; for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices.

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact, that Scrooge had seen it night and morning, during his whole residence in that place ; also that Scrooge had as little of what is called fancy about him as any man in the city of London.

And yet it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, without its undergoing any intermediate process of change—not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face ! It was not in impenetrable shadow, ~~as the~~ other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look : with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air ; and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again.

To say that he was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key he had relinquished, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.

He *did* pause, with a moment's irresolution, before he shut

the door ; and he *did* look cautiously behind it first, as if he half expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on, so he said, "Pooh, pooh !" and closed it with a bang.

The sound resounded through the house like thunder. Every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes. He fastened the door, and walked across the hall, and up the stairs ; slowly, too ; trimming his candle as he went.

Up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that. Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting-room, bed-room, lumber-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table ; nobody under the sofa ; a small fire in the grate ; spoon and basin ready ; and the little saucepan of gruel (Scrooge had a cold in his head) upon the hob.* Nobody under the bed ; nobody in the closet ; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and locked himself in ; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his cravat ; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his night-cap ; and sat down before the fire to take his gruel.

After several turns, he sat down again. As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell that hung in the room, and communicated for some purpose, now forgotten, with a chamber in the highest story of the building. It was with great astonishment, and

6. The *hob* of a fireplace is the raised stone, or flat part of the grate, on either side of the hearth, where things are placed to be kept warm.

with a strange, inexplicable dread, that, as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound ; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seemed an hour. The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below, as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains.

The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise much louder, on the floors below ; then coming up the stairs ; then coming straight toward his door.

"It's humbug still !" said Scrooge. "I won't believe it."

His color changed though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried "I know him ! Marley's ghost !" and fell again.

The same face ; the very same. Marley in his pig-tail, usual waistcoat, tights, and boots. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long and wound about him like a tail ; and it was made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent ; so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels, but he had never believed it until now.

No, nor did he believe it even now. Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him ; though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes ; and marked the very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin, which wrapper he had not observed before ; he was still incredulous, and fought against his senses.

"How now!" said Scrooge, caustic and cold as ever.
"What do you want with me?"

"Much"—Marley's voice, no doubt about it.

"Who are you?"

"Ask me who I *was*."

"Who *were* you then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice.

"You're particular, for a shade." He was going to say, "*to a shade*," but substituted this, as more appropriate.

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."

"Can you—can you sit down?" asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

"I can."

"Do it, then."

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn't know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair; and felt that in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explanation. But the Ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

"You don't believe in me," observed the Ghost.

"I don't," said Scrooge.

"What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your own senses?"

"I don't know," said Scrooge.

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because," said Scrooge, "a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are."

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, nor did he feel in his heart, by any means, waggish then. The truth is, that he tried to be smart, as a means of distracting his own attention, and keeping down his terror. But how much greater was his horror, when the phantom, taking off the bandage round his head, as if it were too warm

to wear indoors, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast !

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

"Mercy !" he said. "Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me ?"

"Man of the worldly mind !" replied the Ghost, "do you believe in me or not ?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me ?"

"It is required of every man," the Ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death.

"Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more is permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house—mark me !—in life my spirit never roved beyond our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me !"

"Seven years dead," mused Scrooge. "And traveling all the time ?"

"The whole time," said the Ghost. "No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse."

"You travel fast ?" said Scrooge.

"On the wings of the wind," replied the Ghost.

"You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years," said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry and clanked its chain hideously in the dead silence of the night.

"O ! captive, bound, and double-ironed," cried the phantom, "not to know that ages of incessant labor, by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret

can make amends for one life's opportunities misused ! Yet such was I ! Oh, such was I ! ”

“ But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,” faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

“ Business ! ” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. “ Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business ; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were all ~~my~~ business.”

Scrooge was very much dismayed to hear the specter going on at this rate, and began to quake exceedingly.

“ Hear me ! ” cried the Ghost. “ My time is nearly gone.”

“ I will,” said Scrooge. “ But don't be hard upon me ! Don't be flowery, Jacob ! Pray ! ”

“ How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day.”

It was not an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

“ That is no light part of my penance,” pursued the Ghost. “ I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer.”

“ You were always a good friend to me,” said Scrooge. “ Thank'ee ! ”

“ You will be haunted,” resumed the Ghost, “ by three Spirits.”

“ Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob ? ” he demanded, in a faltering voice.

“ It is.”

“ I—I think I'd rather not,” said Scrooge.

“ Without their visits,” said the Ghost, “ you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first to-morrow, when the bell tolls One.”

“ Couldn't I take 'em all at once, and have it over, Jacob ? ” hinted Scrooge.

“ Expect the second on the next night at the same hour

The third, upon the next night when the last stroke of Twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more ; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us !”

The apparition walked backward from him ; and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that, when the specter reached it, it was wide open.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say “Humbug !” but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull conversation of the Ghost, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose, went straight to bed without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

Stave II.

THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS.

WHEN Scrooge awoke, it was so dark, that, looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber. He was endeavoring to pierce the darkness with his ferret eyes, when the chimes of a neighboring church struck the four quarters. So he listened for the hour.

To his great astonishment the heavy bell went on from six to seven, and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve ; then stopped. Twelve ! It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong.

He touched the spring of his repeater, to correct this most preposterous clock. Its rapid little pulse beat twelve, and stopped.

“Why, it isn’t possible,” said Scrooge, “that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night. It isn’t

possible that any thing has happened to the sun, and this is twelve at noon ! ”

The idea being an alarming one, he scrambled out of bed, and groped his way to the window. He was obliged to rub the frost off with the sleeve of his dressing-gown before he could see any thing ; and could see very little then. All he could make out was, that it was still very foggy and extremely cold, and that there was no noise of people running to and fro, and making a great stir, as there unquestionably would have been if night had beaten off bright day, and taken possession of the world.

Scrooge went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over, and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was ; and the more he endeavored not to think, the more he thought.

Scrooge lay in this state until the chime had gone three quarters more, when he remembered, on a sudden, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. He resolved to lie awake until the hour was passed ; and, considering that he could not go to sleep, this was, perhaps, the wisest resolution in his power.

The quarter was so long, that he was more than once convinced he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously, and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear.

“ Ding, dong ! ”

“ A quarter past,” said Scrooge, counting.

“ Ding, dong ! ”

“ Half past ! ” said Scrooge.

“ Ding, dong ! ”

“ A quarter to it,” said Scrooge.

“ Ding, dong ! ”

“ The hour itself,” said Scrooge, triumphantly ; “ and nothing else ! ”

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE. Light flashed up

in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, nor the curtains at his back, but those to which his face was addressed. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside ; and Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor.

It was a strange figure—like a child ; yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age ; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin.

It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand ; and in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright, clear jet of light, by which all this was visible ; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extingisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.

"Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me ?" asked Scrooge.

"I am !"

The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

"Who, and what are you ?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

"Long past ?" inquired Scrooge.

"No. Your past."

He then made bold to inquire what business brought him there.

"Your welfare ! Rise, and walk with me !" said the Ghost.

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the

weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes; that the bed was warm and the thermometer a long way below freezing; that he was clad but lightly in his slippers, dressing-gown, and nightcap. The grasp, though gentle as a woman's hand, was not to be resisted. He rose, but finding that the Spirit made toward the window, clasped its robe in supplication.

"I am a mortal," Scrooge remonstrated, "and liable to fall."

"Bear but a touch of my hand *there*," said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be upheld in more than this!"

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

"Good Heaven!" said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. "I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!"

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and instantaneous, appeared still present to the old man's sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odors floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts and hopes and joys and cares, long, long forgotten!

"Your lip is trembling," said the Ghost. "And what is that upon your cheek?"

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

"You recollect the way?" inquired the Spirit.

"Remember it!" cried Scrooge with fervor; "I could walk it blindfold."

"Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!" observed the Ghost. "Let us go on."

They walked along the road, Scrooge recognizing every gate and post and tree, until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some shaggy ponies now were seen trotting toward them with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other, until the broad fields were so full of merry music, that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

"These are but shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "They have no consciousness of us."

The jocund travelers came on ; and as they came, Scrooge knew and named them every one. Why was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them ? Why did his cold eye glisten, and his heart leap up as they went past ? Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them give each other Merry Christmas, as they parted at cross-roads and by-ways for their several homes ?

"The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. "A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still."

Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

They left the high-road, by a well-remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weathercock-surmounted cupola, on the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes ; for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Nor was it more retentive of its ancient state, within ; for, entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an earthly savor in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candlelight, and not too much to eat.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by

lines of plain deal forms¹ and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire ; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he had used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the paneling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the heart of Scrooge with softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man in foreign garments, wonderfully real and distinct to look at, stood outside the window, with an axe stuck in his belt, and leading by the bridle an ass laden with wood.

"Why, it's Ali Baba!"² Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. "It's dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know. One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he *did* come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine,"³ said Scrooge, "and his wild brother, Orson ; there they go ! And the Sultan's groom turned upside down by the Genii ; there he is upon his head ! Served him right. I'm glad of it. What business had *he* to be married to the Princess ?"

To hear Scrooge expending all the earnestness of his nature on such subjects, in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying ; and to see his heightened and excited face, would have been a surprise to his business friends in the city, indeed.

1. **Deal Forms.**—Long benches or forms to sit on, used in the English schools. **Deal**, wood of a fir-tree, in some parts of England called *deal-tree*.

2. **Ali Baba.**—The poor wood-carrier who accidentally learned the magic words, "Open Sesame !" in the familiar story of the "Arabian Nights," called "Ali Baba or the Forty Thieves."

3. **Valentine and Orson.**—Twin sons of Bellisant and Alexander (Emperor of Constantinople). They figure as characters in an old romance of the 15th century.

"There's the parrot!" cried Scrooge. "Green body and yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce growing out of the top of his head; there he is! Poor Robin Crusoe,"⁴ he called him, when he came home again after sailing round the island. 'Poor Robin Crusoe; where have you been, Robin Crusoe?' The man thought he was dreaming, but he wasn't. It was the parrot, you know. There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek! Halloo! Hoop! Halloo!"

Then, with a rapidity of transition, very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self, "Poor boy!" and cried again.

"I wish," Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff; "but it's too late now."

"What is the matter?" asked the Spirit.

"Nothing," said Scrooge,—“nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something, that's all.”

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand, saying as he did so, "Let us see another Christmas!"

Scrooge's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrunk, the windows cracked; fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling, and the naked laths were shown instead; but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it was quite correct; that everything had happened so; that there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays.

He was not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge looked at the Ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head glanced anxiously toward the door.

It opened; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her "Dear, dear brother."

4. **Poor Robin Crusoe.**—Reference is made to several well-known incidents in De Foe's masterly fiction called the "Adventures of Robinson Crusoe."

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" said the child, clapping her tiny hands. "To bring you home, home, home!"

"Home, little Fan?" returned the boy.

"Yes!" said the child, brimfull of glee. "Home, for good and all. Father is so much kinder than he used to be! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said, Yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're to be a man!" said the child, opening her eyes, "and are never to come back here; but first, we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

"You are quite a woman, little Fan!" exclaimed the boy.

She clapped her hands and laughed, and tried to touch his head; but, being too little, laughed again, and stood on tip-toe to embrace him. Then she began to drag him, in her childish eagerness, toward the door; and he, nothing loath to go, accompanied her.

A terrible voice in the hall cried, "Bring down Master Scrooge's box, there!" and in the hall appeared the schoolmaster himself, who glared on Master Scrooge with a ferocious condescension, and threw him into a dreadful state of mind by shaking hands with him. He then conveyed him and his sister into the veriest old well of a shivering best-parlor that ever was seen, where the maps upon the wall, and the celestial and terrestrial globes in the windows, were waxy with cold. Here he produced a decanter of curiously light wine, and a block of curiously heavy cake, and administered instalments of those dainties to the young people: at the same time sending out a meager servant to offer a glass of "something" to the post-boy, who answered that he thanked the gentleman, but if it was the same tap as he had tasted before, he had rather not. Master Scrooge's trunk being by this time tied on to the top of the chaise, the children bade the schoolmaster good by right willingly; and, getting into it, drove gayly down the

garden-sweep: the quick wheels dashing the hoar-frost and snow from off the dark leaves of the evergreens like spray.

"Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered," said the Ghost. "But she had a large heart!"

"So she had," cried Scrooge. "You're right. I will not gainsay it, Spirit. God forbid."

"She died a woman," said the Ghost, "and had, as I think, children."

"One child," Scrooge returned.

"True," said the Ghost. "Your nephew!"

Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind; and answered briefly, "Yes."

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city.

It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "Was I apprenticed here!"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind a high desk, Scrooge cried in great excitement:—

"Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence; and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:—

"Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

Scrooge's former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-apprentice.

"Dick Wilkins, to be sure!" said Scrooge to the Ghost. "Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear."

"Yo ho, my boys!" said Fezziwig. "No more work to-

night. Christmas Eve, Dick! Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up," cried old Fezziwig, with a sharp clap of his hands, "before a man can say Jack Robinson!" Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here!"

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn't have cleared away, or couldn't have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life forevermore; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Misses Fezziwig, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In they all came one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once; hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; old top couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting off again as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them! When this result was brought about, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out: "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose.

There were more dances, and there were more forfeits,

5. "**Jack Robinson.**"—The words of this very popular saying originated from a famous comic song. The last line is, "And he was off before he could say Jack Robinson." The words were sung to the tune of the "Sailor's Hornpipe."

and more dances, and there was cake, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley."* Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too ; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them ; three or four and twenty pair of partners ; people who were not to be trifled with ; people who *would* dance, and had no notion of walking.

But if they had been twice as many—ah, four times—old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to *her*, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that's not high praise, tell me higher, and I'll use it. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance ; advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and courtesy, corkscrew, thread-the-needle, and back again to your place ; Fezziwig "cut"—cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two 'prentices, they did the same to them ; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds, which were under a counter in the back-shop.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright

6. "Sir Roger de Coverley."—A dance named in honor of a Baronet of Coverley near Cowley, near Oxford, England, whose great-grandson figured so prominently in Addison's "Spectator." Cf. *Spectator*, No. 2.

faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

"A small matter," said the Ghost, "to make these silly folks so full of gratitude."

"Small!" echoed Scrooge.

The Spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig; and when he had done so, said:—

"Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money; three or four, perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?"

"It isn't that," said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter, self,— "it isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

He felt the Spirit's glance, and stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked the Ghost.

"Nothing particular," said Scrooge.

"Something, I think?" the Ghost insisted.

"No," said Scrooge, "no. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That's all."*

Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

"My time grows short," observed the Spirit. "Quick!"

* The scene changes, and Scrooge sees himself in the prime of life. "His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years, but it had begun to wear the signs of avarice;" and a young girl stands beside him, and tells him that another idol, a golden one, has displaced her, and that she releases him. "May you be as happy in the life you have chosen!" she says sorrowfully, and disappears. "Spirit!" says Scrooge, "show me no more; conduct me home." But the Ghost points again, and the wretched man sees a happy home,—husband and wife, and many children; and the matron is she whom he might have called his own.

"Spirit !" said Scrooge, in a broken voice, "remove me from this place."

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "That they are what they are, do not blame me !"

"Remove me !" Scrooge exclaimed. "I cannot bear it ! Leave me. Take me back. Haunt me no longer !"

He was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness, and further, of being in his own bed room.

He had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.



Stave III.

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS.

AWAKING in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bell was again upon the stroke of One. He began to wonder which of his curtains this new specter would draw back. He put them every one aside with his own hands, and lying down again, established a sharp lookout all round the bed. For he wished to challenge the Spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise and made nervous.

When the bell struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. All this time he lay upon his bed, the very core and center of a blaze of ruddy light, which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour ; and which, being only light, was more alarming than a dozen ghosts, as he was powerless to make out what it meant. At last, however, he began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room, from whence, on further tracing it, it seemed

to shine. This idea taking full possession of his mind, he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name, and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove, from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly,¹ mistletoe,² and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that dull petrification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes,³ and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn,⁴ and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in, and know me better, man!" Scrooge entered timidly.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Present," said the Spirit. "Look upon me!" Scrooge did so.

1. **Holly.**—A shrub with glossy green leaves and bright red berries. A sprig of it was commonly used to ornament the Christmas pudding.

2. **Mistletoe.**—A creeping plant which grows on trees, especially the oak. It was used by the Druids in their religious ceremonies.

The mistletoe is hung up in English farm-houses and kitchens at Christmas, and the young men have the privilege of kissing the girls under it, plucking each time a berry from the bush. When the berries are all plucked the privilege ceases.

3. **Twelfth-cakes.**—Made in honor of twelfth day, i.e. twelve days after Christmas, or the Epiphany.

4. **Plenty's Horn.**—*Cornucopia*, horn of plenty. Ceres, the goddess of grain, is drawn with a ram's horn in the left arm, filled with fruit and flowers.

"You have never seen the like of me before !" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Never," Scrooge made answer to it.

"Have never walked forth with the younger members of my family ; meaning (for I am very young) my elder brothers born in these later years ?" pursued the Phantom.

"I don't think I have," said Scrooge. "I am afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, Spirit ?"

"More than eighteen hundred," said the Ghost.

"A tremendous family to provide for," muttered Scrooge.

The Ghost of Christmas Present rose.

"Spirit," said Scrooge submissively, "conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learned a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it."

"Touch my robe !"

Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkey, geese, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanished instantly. So did the room, the fire, the ruddy glow, the hour of night, and they stood, in the city streets on Christmas morning.* They went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost, that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease ; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall.

And perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit had in showing off this power of his, or else it was his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk's ; for there he went, and took Scrooge with him, holding to his robe ; and on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled and stopped to bless

* A charming description of the busy London streets about the great markets on Christmas morning is here omitted.

Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinklings of his torch. Think of that ! Bob had but fifteen "Bob"⁵ a week himself ; he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name ; and yet the ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house !

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Cratchit's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence ; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons, while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his monstrous shirt-collar (Bob's private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honor of the day) into his mouth, rejoiced to find himself so gallantly attired, and yearned to show his linen in the fashionable parks. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own ; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he (not proud, although his collars nearly choked him) blew the fire, until the slow potatoes bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

"What has ever got your precious father then ?" said Mrs. Cratchit. "And your brother, Tiny Tim ! And Martha warn't as late last Christmas Day by half an hour !"

"Here's Martha, mother !" said a girl, appearing as she spoke.

"Here's Martha, mother !" cried the two young Cratchits.

"Hurrah ! There's *such* a goose, Martha !"

"Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are !" said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her with officious zeal.

"We'd a deal of work to finish up last night," replied the girl, "and had to clear away this morning, mother !"

5. "Bob."—An English shilling. Contraction of *baubee*, a debased copper coin, value of halfpenny, issued in the reign of James VI. of Scotland.

"Well! never mind so long as you are come," said Mrs. Cratchit. "Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye!"

"No, no! There's father coming," cried the two young Cratchits, who were everywhere at once. "Hide, Martha, hide!"

So Martha hid herself, and in came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter, exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him; and his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

"Why, where's our Martha?" cried Bob Cratchit, looking round.

"Not coming," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"Not coming!" said Bob, with a sudden declension in his high spirits; for he had been Tim's blood horse all the way from church, and had come home rampant. "Not coming upon Christmas Day!"

Martha didn't like to see him disappointed, if it were only in joke, so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

"And how did little Tim behave?" asked Mrs. Cratchit, when she had rallied Bob on his credulity, and Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart's content.

"As good as gold," said Bob, "and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember, upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see."*


6. Beggars walk, etc.—Cf. Matt. ix. 2-9; 27-32; John v. 5-10.

Bob's voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool beside the fire ; and while Bob, turning up his cuffs—as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby—compounded some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the hob to simmer, Master Peter and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds ; a feathered phenomenon, to which a black swan was a matter of course—and in truth it was something very like it in that house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot ; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigor ; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce ; Martha dusted the hot plates ; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table ; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast ; but when she did, and when the long expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah !

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family ; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit



said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), they hadn't ate it all at last ! Yet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular, were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows ! But now the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone—too nervous to bear witnesses—to take the pudding up, and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be done enough ! Suppose it should break in turning out ! Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back-yard, and stolen it, while they were merry with the goose—a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid ! All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Hallo ! A great deal of steam ! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day ! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastrycook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that ! That was the pudding ! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed, but smiling proudly—with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern⁷ of ignited brandy, and bedight⁸ with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

O, a wonderful pudding ! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel full of chestnuts on the

7. **Quartern.**—One-fourth of a pint, a gill. How much brandy was used?

8. **Bedight.**—To adorn, to dress ; a word little used.

fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one ; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass,—two tumblers and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done ; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed :—

“A merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us !”

Which all the family re-echoed.

“God bless us every one !” said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

He sat very close to his father's side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter's being a man of business ; and Peter himself looked thoughtfully at the fire from between his collars, as if he were deliberating what particular investments he should favor when he came into the receipt of that bewildering income. Martha, who was a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them what kind of work she had to do, and how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie abed to-morrow morning for a good long rest ; to-morrow being a holiday she passed at home. Also how she had seen a countess and a lord some days before ; and how the lord “was much about as tall as Peter ;” at which Peter pulled up his collars so high that you couldn't have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chestnuts and the jug went round and round ; and by and by they had a song, about a lost child traveling in the snow, from Tiny Tim, who had a plaintive little voice, and sang it very well indeed.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family ; they were not well dressed ; their shoes

were far from being water-proof ; their clothes were scanty ; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time ; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last.*

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial place of giants ; and water spread itself wheresoever it listed ; or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner ; and nothing grew but moss and furze, and coarse, rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun had left a streak of fiery red, which glared upon the desolation for an instant, like a sullen eye, and frowning lower, lower, lower yet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

"What place is this ?" asked Scrooge.

"A place where miners live who labor in the bowels of the earth," returned the Spirit. "But they know me. See !"

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children's children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out gayly in their holiday attire. The old man, in a voice that seldom rose above the howling of the wind upon the barren waste, was singing them a Christmas song—it had been a very old song when he was a boy—and from time to time they all joined in the chorus. So surely as they raised

* Scrooge and the ghost now speed on. They stand upon the bleak and deserted moor where the miners are singing their Christmas songs. They fly out on the sea and visit the solitary light-house and hear the two keepers wish each other "Merry Christmas." Out upon the dark and heaving ocean they speed and stand beside the helmsman at the wheel, the lookout in the bow, and the dark, ghostly figures on deck, and every man among them is humming a Christmas tune. The text is here omitted.

their voices the old man got quite blithe and loud ; and so surely as they stopped, his vigor sank again.

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped—whither ? Not to sea ? To sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them ; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled, and roared, and raged among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafed and dashed, the wild year through, there stood a solitary light-house. Great heaps of sea-weed clung to its base, and storm-birds—born of the wind one might suppose, as sea-weed of the water—rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed.

But even here, two men who watched the light had made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone wall shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their horny hands over the rough table at which they sat, they wished each other Merry Christmas in their can of grog ; and one of them—the elder, too, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard weather, as the figure-head of an old ship might be—struck up a sturdy song that was like a gale in itself.

Again the Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the lookout in the bow, the officers who had the watch ; dark, ghostly figures in their several stations ; but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought, or spoke below his breath to his companion of some bygone Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it. And every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, had had a kinder word for one another on that day than on any day in the year ; and had shared to some extent in its festivities ; and had remembered those he cared for at a distance, and had known that they delighted to remember him.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while thus engaged, to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognize it as his own nephew's, and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room, with the Spirit standing smiling by his side, and looking at that same nephew.

It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humor. When Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way, Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends being not a bit behind, roared out lustily.

"He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!" cried Scrooge's nephew. "He believed it, too!"

"More shame for him, Fred!" said Scrooge's niece, indignantly. Bless those women! they never do anything by halves. They are always in earnest.

She was very pretty; exceedingly pretty. With a dimpled, surprised-looking, capital face; a ripe little mouth that seemed made to be kissed—as no doubt it was; all kinds of good little dots about her chin, that melted into one another when she laughed; and the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw in any little creature's head. Altogether she was what you would have called provoking, you know; but satisfactory, too. O, perfectly satisfactory!

"He's a comical old fellow," said Scrooge's nephew, "that's the truth; and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offences carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself always! Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He don't lose much of a dinner."

"Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," interrupted Scrooge's niece. Everybody else said the same, and they must be allowed to have been competent judges, because they had just had dinner; and with the dessert upon the table, were clustered round the fire, by lamplight.

"Well, I am very glad to hear it," said Scrooge's nephew, "because I haven't any great faith in these young house-keepers. What do *you* say, Topper?"

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge's niece's sisters, for he answered that a bachelor was a wretched out-cast, who had no right to express an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge's niece's sister—the plump one with the lace tucker, not the one with the roses—blushed.

After tea, they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about, when they sung a glee or catch, I can assure you ; especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never swell the large veins in his forehead, or get red in the face over it.

But they didn't devote the whole evening to music. After a while they played at forfeits ; for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself. There was first a game at blind-man's buff. Of course there was. And I no more believe Topper was really blind than I believe he had eyes in his boots. The way he went after that plump sister in the lace tucker, was an outrage on the credulity of human nature. Knocking down the fire-irons, tumbling over the chairs, bumping up against the piano, smothering himself amongst the curtains ; wherever she went, there went he ! He always knew where the plump sister was. He wouldn't catch anybody else. If you had fallen up against him (as some of them did) on purpose, he would have made a feint of endeavoring to seize you, which would have been an affront to your understanding, and would instantly have sidled off in the direction of the plump sister.

"Here is a new game," said Scrooge. "One half-hour, Spirit, only one !"

It was a game called Yes and No, where Scrooge's nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what ; he only answering to their questions yes or no, as the case was. The brisk fire of questioning to which he was exposed elicited from him that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal,

rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal that growled and grunted sometimes, and talked sometimes, and lived in London, and walked about the streets, and wasn't made a show of, and wasn't led by anybody, and didn't live in a menagerie, and was never killed in a market, and was not a horse, or an ass, or a cow, or a bull, or a tiger, or a dog, or a pig, or a cat, or a bear. At every fresh question that was put to him, this nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter, and was so inexpressibly tickled that he was obliged to get up off the sofa, and stamp. At last the plump sister, falling into a similar state, cried out :

"I have found it out ! I know what it is, Fred ! I know what it is !"

"What is it ?" cried Fred.

"It is your Uncle Scro-o-o-o-oge !"

Which it certainly was.

Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart, that he would have pledged the unconscious company in return, and thanked them in an inaudible speech, if the Ghost had given him time. But the whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew ; and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick-beds, and they were cheerful ; on foreign lands, and they were close at home ; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope ; by poverty, and it was rich. In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority had not made fast the door, and barred the Spirit out, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It was a long night, if it were only a night ; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together. It was strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew older, clearly

der. Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it, until they left a children's Twelfth Night party," when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was gray.

"Are spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"My life upon this globe is very brief," replied the Ghost. "It ends to-night."

"To-night!" cried Scrooge.

"To-night, at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near."

The chimes were ringing the three quarters past eleven at that moment.

The bell struck twelve.

Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming like a mist along the ground toward him.



Stave IV.

THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS.

THE Phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible, save one outstretched hand.

He felt that it was tall and stately when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

9. *The Twelfth Night* (twelfth after Christmas) was in olden times the season of universal festivity—of masques, pageants, feasts and traditional sports. For full explanation, see cyclopedia articles on "Epiphany" and "Bean King's Festival," and "Jan. 6th," in Chambers's *Book of Days*.

"I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come ?" said Scrooge.

"Ghost of the Future !" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any specter I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me ?"

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

"Lead on !" said Scrooge,—"lead on ! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit !"

The Phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, he thought, and carried him along.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city ; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. But there they were in the heart of it ; on 'Change, amongst the merchants, who hurried up and down, and chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, and looked at their watches, and trifled thoughtfully with their great gold seals, and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The spirit stopped beside one little knot of business men. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

"No," said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, "I don't know much about it either way. I only know he's dead."

"When did he die ?" inquired another.

"Last night, I believe."

"Why, what was the matter with him ?" asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff-box. "I thought he'd never die."

"God knows," said the first with a yawn.

"What has he done with his money ?" asked a red-faced

gentlemen with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose, that shook like the gills of a turkey-cock.

"I haven't heard," said the man with a large chin, yawning again. "Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to *me*. That's all I know."

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial; but feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. They could scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob his old partner, for that was Past, and this Ghost's province was the Future.

He looked about in that very place for his own image; but another man stood in his accustomed corner, and though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes that poured in through the Porch. It gave him little surprise, however; for he had been revolving in his mind a change of life, and thought and hoped he saw his new-born resolutions carried out in this.

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognized its situation, and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly, and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth and misery.

Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beetling-shop, below a penthouse roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal, were bought. Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds.

Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal stove, made of old bricks, was a gray-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age, who smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scrooge and the Phantom came into the presence of this man, just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered, when another woman, similarly laden, came in too ; and she was closely followed by a man in faded black. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh.

"Let the charwoman alone to be the first !" cried she who had entered first. "Let the laundress alone to be the second ; and let the undertaker's man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here's a chance ! If we haven't all three met here without meaning it !"

"You couldn't have met in a better place," said old Joe, removing his pipe from his mouth. "Come into the parlor. You were made free of it long ago, you know ; and the other two an't strangers. Come into the parlor. Come into the parlor !"

The parlor was the space behind a screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together with an old stairrod, and having trimmed his smoky lamp (for it was night) with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

While he did this, the woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor and sat down in a flaunting manner on a stool ; crossing her elbows on her knees, and looking with a bold defiance at the other two.

"What odds then ! What odds, Mrs. Dilber ?" said the woman. "Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did ! Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these ? Not a dead man, I suppose."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Dilber, laughing.

"If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead," pursued the woman, "why wasn't he natural in his lifetime ? If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself."

"It's the truest word that ever was spoke," said Mrs. Dilber. "It's a judgment on him."

"I wish it was a little heavier judgment," replied the woman ; "and it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else. Open the bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I'm not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it."

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening it, and having unfastened a great many knots, dragged out a large heavy roll of some dark stuff.

"What do you call this ?" said Joe. "Bed-curtains !"

"Ah !" returned the woman, laughing and leaning forward on her crossed arms. "Bed-curtains. Don't drop that oil upon the blankets, now."

"His blankets ?" asked Joe.

"Whose else's do you think ?" replied the woman. "He isn't likely to take cold without 'em, I dare say. Ah ! You may look through that shirt till your eyes ache ; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's best he had, and a fine one too. They'd have wasted it, if it hadn't been for me."

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror.

"Spirit !" said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot, "I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way now. Merciful Heaven, what is this ?"

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bare, uncurtained bed.

A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed ; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

"Spirit !" he said, "this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go !* Let me see

* Scrooge now asks the Ghost to show him any person in the town who felt emotion caused by this man's death. A touching scene is introduced of a care-worn husband and his anxious wife, who would have been driven out of their home by this man just dead. The wife with clasped hands thanks God for his death, but prayed forgiveness the next moment.

some tenderness connected with a death, or that dark chamber, Spirit, which we left just now, will be forever present to me."

The Ghost conducted him through several streets familiar to his feet; and as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere was he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratchit's house, the dwelling he had visited before and found the mother and the children seated round the fire.

Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in sewing. But surely they were very quiet!

"'And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them.'"

Where had Scrooge heard those words? He had not dreamed them. The boy must have read them out, as he and the Spirit crossed the threshold. Why did he not go on?

The mother laid her work upon the table, and put her hand up to her face.

"The color hurts my eyes," she said.

The color? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

"They're better now, again," said Cratchit's wife. "It makes them weak by candle-light; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time."

"Past it, rather," Peter answered, shutting up his book. "But I think he has walked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, mother."

They were very quiet again. At last she said, and in a steady, cheerful voice, that only faltered once:—

"I have known him walk with—I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder very fast indeed."

"And so have I," cried Peter. "Often."

"And so have I," exclaimed another. So had all.

1. "And he took a child," etc.—Cf. Mark ix. 36.

Contrast the tender pathos of the death of Tiny Tim and the ghastly details attending the death of old Scrooge.

"But he was very light to carry," she resumed, intent upon her work, "and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble ; no trouble. And there is your father at the door !"

She hurried out to meet him ; and little Bob in his comforter—he had need of it, poor fellow—came in. His tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most. Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid, each child, a little cheek against his face, as if they said, "Don't mind it, father." "Don't be grieved !"

Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Cratchit and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday.

"Sunday ! You went to-day, then, Robert ?" said his wife.

"Yes, my dear," returned Bob. "I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child !" cried Bob, "my little child !"

He broke down all at once. He couldn't help it. If he could have helped it, he and his child would have been farther apart perhaps than they were.

He left the room and went up stairs into the room above, which was lighted cheerfully, and hung with Christmas. There was a chair set close beside the child, and there were signs of some one having been there lately. Poor Bob sat down in it, and when he had thought a little and composed himself, he kissed the little face. He was reconciled to what had happened, and went down again quite happy.

They drew about the fire, and talked ; the girls and mother working still. Bob told them of the extraordinary kindness of Mr. Scrooge's nephew, whom he had scarcely seen but once, and who meeting him in the street that day and seeing that he looked a little—"just a little down you know," said Bob, inquired what had happened to distress him. "On which,"

said Bob, "for he is the pleasantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard, I told him. 'I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit,' he said, 'and heartily sorry for your good wife.' By the by, how he ever knew *that* I don't know."

"Knew what, my dear?"

"Why, that you were a good wife," replied Bob.

"Everybody knows that!" said Peter.

"Very well observed, my boy!" cried Bob. "I hope they do. 'Heartily sorry,' he said, 'for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way,' he said, giving me his card, 'that's where I live. Pray come to me.' Now, it wasn't," cried Bob, "for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us."

"I'm sure he's a good soul!" said Mrs. Cratchit.

"You would be sure of it, my dear," returned Bob, "if you saw and spoke to him. I shouldn't be at all surprised—mark what I say—if he got Peter a better situation."

"Only hear that, Peter," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"And then," cried one of the girls, "Peter will be keeping company with some one, and setting up for himself."

"Get along with you," retorted Peter, grinning.

"It's just as likely as not," said Bob, "one of these days; though there's plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim—shall we?—or this first parting that there was among us?"

"Never, father!" cried they all.

"And I know," said Bob, "I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was—although he was a little, little child—we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it."

"No, never, father!" they all cried again.

"I am very happy," said little Bob, "I am very happy!"

Mrs. Cratchit kissed him, his daughters kissed him, the two

young Cratchits kissed him, and Peter and himself shook hands. Spirit of Tiny Tim, the childish essence was from God !

"Specter," said Scrooge, "something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead ?"

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come conveyed him, as before—though at a different time, he thought ; indeed, there seemed no order in these latter visions, save that they were in the Future—into the resorts of business men, but showed him not himself. Indeed, the Spirit did not stay for anything, but went straight on, as to the end just now desired, until besought by Scrooge to tarry for a moment.

"This court," said Scrooge, "through which we hurry now, is where my place of occupation is, and has been for a length of time. I see the house. Let me behold what I shall be in days to come."

The Spirit stopped ; the hand was pointed elsewhere.

"The house is yonder," Scrooge exclaimed. "Why do you point away ?"

The inexorable finger underwent no change.

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office, and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not himself. The Phantom pointed as before.

He joined it once again, and, wondering why and whither he had gone, accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. He paused to look round before entering.

A churchyard. Here, then, the wretched man, whose name he had now to learn, lay underneath the ground. It was a worthy place. Walled in by houses ; overrun by grass and weeds, the growth of vegetation's death, not life ; choked up with too much burying ; fat with repleted appetite. A worthy place !

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to one. He advanced toward it, trembling. The Phantom was

exactly as it had been, but he dreaded that he saw new meaning in its solemn shape.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of the things that May be, only?"

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

The Spirit was immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept toward it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE.

"Am I that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

"No, Spirit! O, no, no!"

The finger still was there.

"Spirit!" he cried, tightly clutching at his robe, "hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this if I am past all hope?"

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

"Good Spirit," he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it: "Your nature intercedes for me and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me by an altered life!"

The kind hand trembled.

"I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

Stave V.

THE END OF IT.

YES ! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in !

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future !" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Old Jacob Marley ! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this ! I say it on my knees, old Jacob ; on my knees !"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down," cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here—I am here—the shadows of the things that would have been may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will !"

His hands were busy with his garments all this time ; turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

"I don't know what to do !" cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath ; and making a perfect Laocoön¹ of

1. **Laocoön**.—A Trojan priest, who, with his two sons, was crushed by serpents. Thomson, in his "Liberty," has described the group—which represents

himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody ! A happy New Year to all the world ! Hallo here ! Whoop ! Hallo !"

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was now standing there, perfectly winded.

"There's the saucepan that the gruel was in !" cried Scrooge, starting off again, and going round the fire-place. "There's the door by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered ! There's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present sat ! There's the window where I saw the wandering Spirits ! It's all right, it's all true, it all happened. Ha, ha, ha !"

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs !

"I don't know what day of the month it is," said Scrooge, "I don't know how long I have been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallo ! Whoop ! Hallo here !"

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer ; ding, dong, bell. Bell, dong, ding ; hammer, clang, clash ! O, glorious, glorious !

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist ; clear, bright, jovial, stirring cold ; cold, piping for the blood to dance to ; golden sunlight ; heavenly sky ; sweet fresh air ; merry bells. O, glorious, glorious !

"What's to-day ?" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

"Er !" returned the boy, with all his might of wonder.

"What's to-day, my fine fellow ?" said Scrooge.

these three in their death agony. This exquisite group of statuary was sculptured in the 5th century A.C., was discovered in 1506 in the baths of Titus, and is now in the Vatican. Cf. Virgil's "*Æneid*," Book II., l. 201-227.

"To-day !" replied the boy. "Why, CHRISTMAS DAY."

"It's Christmas Day !" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow !"

"Hallo !" returned the boy.

"Do you know the poulterer's in the next street but one, at the corner ?" Scrooge inquired.

"I should hope I did," replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy !" said Scrooge. "A remarkable boy ! Do you know whether they've sold the prize turkey that was hanging up there ?—not the little prize turkey ; the big one ?"

"What, the one as big as me ?" returned the boy.

"What a delightful boy !" said Scrooge. "It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck !"

"It's hanging there now," replied the boy.

"Is it !" said Scrooge. "Go and buy it."

"Walk-er² !" exclaimed the boy.

"No, no," said Scrooge, "I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell 'em to bring it here, that I may give them the directions where to take it. Come back with the man, and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes, and I'll give you half a crown !" The boy was off like a shot.

"I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's," whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a laugh. "He shan't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller³ never made such a joke as sending it to Bob's will be !"

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one ; but write it he did, somehow, and went down stairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer's man. As he stood there, waiting his arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

2. *Walk-er*.—A slang term, which implies incredulity.

3. "*Joe Miller*"—Who has given his name to so many jokes and jests, was a comic actor in London (1684-1738), and was in great request among the tavern frequenters of his day, for his witty sayings. About a year after Miller's death an obscure playwright brought out the so-called "*Joe Miller Jest Book*."

"I shall love it as long as I live!" cried Scrooge, patting it with his hand. "I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face! It's a wonderful knocker!—Here's the turkey. Hallo! Whoop! How are you! Merry Christmas!"

It *was* a turkey! He could never have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped 'em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.

"Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town," said Scrooge. "You must have a cab."

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you are at it.

He dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humored fellows said, "Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!" And Scrooge said often afterward, that of all blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears.

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted the children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows; and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps toward his nephew's house.

He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it.

"Is your master at home, my dear?" said Scrooge to the girl. "Nice girl! Very."

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he, my love?" said Scrooge.

"He's in the dining-room, sir, along with mistress. I'll show you up stairs, if you please."

"Thank'ee. He knows me," said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock.

"I'll go in here, my dear."

"He turned it gently, and sidled his face in, round the door. They were looking at the table; for these young house-keepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

"Fred!" said Scrooge.

"Why bless my soul!" cried Fred, "who's that?"

"It's I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It's a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when *he* came. So did the plump sister, when *she* came. So did every one when *they* came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. O, he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it; yes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come in.

His hat was off before he opened the door; his comforter too. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

"Hallo!" growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice, as near

as he could feign it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Bob. "I am behind my time."

"You are!" repeated Scrooge. "Yes. I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please."

"It's only once a year, sir," pleaded Bob. "It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry, yesterday, sir."

"Now, I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And, therefore," he continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob a dig in the waistcoat—"and, therefore, I am about to raise your salary!"

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it, holding him, and calling to the people in the court for help and a straight-waistcoat.

"A merry Christmas, Bob!" said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. "A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavor to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon. Make up the fires and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!"

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did *not* die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and, knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed, and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterward ; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us ! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One !